

# A Success Case of Learner-Centered Classroom in Higher Education

by

Rose Makaramani, Ph.D

Assistant Professor at Faculty of Education

Rajabhat Institute Suan Sunandha

1 U-tong nok, Dusit, Bangkok 10300, Thailand

makaramani@yahoo.com

*A Paper presented at*

*The Second International Forum on Education Reform: Key Factors in Effective Implementation*

*On 2-5 September 2002 at Ambassador Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand*

## Background

*"Education shall be based on the principle that all learners are capable of learning and self-development, and are regarded as being the most important. The teaching-learning process shall aim at enabling the learners to develop themselves of their own pace and to the best of their potentiality" Section 22*

This section in the National Education Act of B.E.2542 (1999) has made a college teacher like me, for several times, seriously review my past teaching performance.

Many questions have been circled in my brain. One among those is that *"Do I really believe that the students are able to learn and self-develop?"* since I have taught those who framed by society "the second graded students" for many years. My answer is "yes" with "but". It means that even though I try several teaching strategies, there will be some students that cannot learn. In another word, some do not meet my expectation.

If I need to manage an instructional process by adhere the Section 22-24 as my guiding light, *"What must I do? And how?"*

As to the word *"learners are regarded as being the most important"* is easy to apply because if I don't think so I would have not been holding a position of a teacher for so long and enjoyed teaching every minute!

Being a college teacher, I consider myself not a lecturing type. I could not give a straight talk for 100 minutes in a course designated 2(2-0). I prefer to provide activities for students to do instead of to listen. Therefore, my courses, both 2(2-0) and 2(1-2) types, have been carefully planned to get the intended objectives with the least lecturing time. So, my course syllabus is usually contained all activity throughout the semester in details in order to tell my students precisely what to do.

I have been quite satisfied with my work because my teaching has revealed

success according to my intended objectives. Also, results from the students' evaluation of my teaching have assured that I can continue holding this occupation nicely.

However, after self-reviewing along with the Section 22-24, I soon realize that everything I have done, considerably as being a good teacher, belongs to "my", starting from "my" instructional objectives.

So, if there is something wrong, it absolutely points to the word "my". For I have hold myself as a center of learning process. I have thought for them, prepared for them. They have just followed me. I believe that it is the best thing for them. If this was a product to sell, I did have only one best style that I thought for every customer. I forced them and left them no choices. In this case, my business failed!

Good luck for me that my students are nice customers. Whatever I say they follow. Whatever assigned to learn or to do, they do not oppose or dispute. No questions have been asked. Some may complain about too many assignments, but my course plan has never been adjusted for them.

For those abovementioned, it is somehow pointed that I am a teacher-centered type, although it is not a serious case like those who solely perform the talking in front of a classroom all the time.

*So, where is the borderline between "teacher-centered" and "learner-centered"?*

Nobody has given me the answer

for all these questions. So, I presume that I have to look for the answer by myself! That is the reason why the experiment concerning learner-centered approach has been initiated in my classroom approximately 2 ½ years ago.

### **Beginning**

At first, I have shifted my paradigm from "I" to "They" and focused on this realm. In the future, if I could, the next step should be "Individuals".

*To what extent should students take parts in organizing the learning process?*

### **Experimental Case 1**

My first experiment started in a 2 (1-2) course called Practice in Educational Technology and Innovation 1 offered to the third-year undergraduate students in the second semester of 2000. I chose this one, out of 5 courses I were assigned to teach in this semester, because it was designated a practice course. Its description stated 3 major areas of activities for the students to accomplish including administration, service, and production. In the past, all in this course were organized by "me".

For the first time in my teaching career, I walked into the classroom at the first day without course syllabus to handout. I kept my lesson plan in mind. I wondered how it would turn out. I worried that if it failed, my precious time in this period would be wasted

Formerly, this group of students had taken my courses and knew how I was. Therefore, only two were missing

this first period. The rest came to get their course plan in order to comprehend all requirements I expected for them to do.

After routine introduction, I told them that they had to plan their course. They were stunted. Their faces showed confusing. I spent few minutes talking to them about our education law and reform. Then, I asked them for cooperation. They were enthusiastic to try something new with me. Therefore, I gave a group of 7-8 students a blank piece of chart paper and 2 marker pens. A total of 6 groups were given a two-line course description and asked to answer 3 questions.

"If you want to be a good educational technologist,

1. What competencies must you have?
2. What activities will you perform and how to do them to show that you have those competencies?
3. What evidence will you provide to prove that you acquire those competencies?"

I hoped to get course objectives or expected outcomes from the first question, activities from the second one, and evaluation of learning performance from the third one. While waiting, I was thinking whether I had over expectations. After quick glances at their writing, I was energized. When every group finished, they took turns presenting their ideas and discussing to find conclusions for the 3 questions.

Their answers to the first question were grouped into 3 main competencies

that matched keywords in the course description and my expectation for them. There were administration, service and production practicing in educational technology. However, many items could not be in the group. So, they agreed to add one more competency namely self-development. Therefore, the course framework organized by the students consisted of 4 competencies.

For the second question, they proposed to perform each competency task in a form of projects, both by individuals and groups. They would like to have at least one project for each competency.

For the third question, they agreed to write project proposals, record notes of experience, and collect photos, letters of appreciation, evaluation forms, etc. as necessary to be indicators for evaluation of their performance. The most surprising thing for me was that they proposed the presentation of their completed tasks in portfolios. When they asked me how I wanted the portfolio to be, I simply answered, "*Do as you think it is the best way to present yourself systematically.*"

We decided that each person would spend 2 weeks to think and plan, then submit his/her structural chart of activity framework to me for monitoring. Also, they would submit project proposals for approval before beginning to execute. Any changes in the plan could be done with good reasons. This allowed me to evaluate the student's ability to solve problems. After all plans were in my file, I had not seen them in classroom. They were working on their projects. Some

came to see me for consultation. It was not necessary to be on the scheduled time of this course, but to come on that particular time was guaranteed that I was there for them.

I scrutinized their proposals and found that there were diverse and interesting. *The total amount of projects was more than I had in my plan for this course!*

I saw the students preparing their projects in the area of our building. They seemed happy and had fun doing the tasks they chose. They were using full potential of themselves. I discovered that some students were talented, which I had not previously observed. There were competitive between them for the better outcomes as well as helping others. I periodically received reports of progress from some students via e-mail. Some came to give verbal reports. And, some seemed to be missing. If I still knew that they were fine, I let them work uninterrupted.

The students knew that I expected them to work systematically since they already took a course called Systematic Approaches in Educational Technology in the past semester. Therefore, in conducting those administrative competency projects, for instance, they established an organization, duties, personnel, finance, etc.

While the students were occupying with their various projects, I was thinking about other methods to evaluation learning outcomes besides portfolios. How to evaluate them fairly? I

decided to have each of them make a 15-minute oral presentation so I would know their attitudes and achievements derived from this course. Then, I would have them evaluate their friends since I did not have a chance to observe them closely.

I evaluated each portfolio with a checklist that contained items and point values. There were two parts: physical attributes of the portfolio and outcomes of 4 competencies. Most of the portfolios showed systematic works and cooperation. The pictures accompanying each report depicted happy learning process.

After grading 43 portfolios and oral presentations, I called the meeting to ask each student to write down 5 names that deserved grade A. The top-ten names of highest frequency would be in A group, the rest was in B group, and those who had not been chosen were in C group. The two parts of grading were compared. The results were matched and confirmed the accuracy of grading. I was satisfied and so were they.

When I formerly organized this course, the students were asked to perform one project for each of 3 competencies. The projects were my ideas that they had to complete whether they liked or not. The projects usually took places in college or nearby schools. But this time, I found a total of 26 projects. For the forth competency which was self-development, there were an average of 3 projects per student. The area of their works included Bangkok, Nontaburi, Patumtani, Samutsakon and Supanburi. The letters of gratitude, evaluation, and

certification showed that their works benefit not only themselves but also community.

At this point, I considered myself successfully implementing a learner-centered approach in my classroom. However, I still could not figure out exactly to what extent should students take parts in organizing the course? Can they do more than these?

### **Experimental Case 2**

In the second semester of 2001, I repeated my learner-centered approach in the same course with a new group of third-year students. The plan they organized was similar to the one used in 2000. Probably, the students were influenced by the former group since they were in the same academic program.

The learning outcomes of 39 students showed that they conducted a total of 46 projects for the 3 competencies and an average of 3 projects per person for the self-development competency. The area they served this year expanding to include Chonburi, Prajeanburi, Srakaew, Krabi, and Satun. The students performed their projects actively and enthusiastically. They applied knowledge from previously learned courses to use in this course.

After the second experiment, I assured that the students were capable of learning and self-development. They eagerly took parts in organizing learning process. And I learned to trust them.

### **Experimental Case 3**

A 2(2-0) undergraduate course called Utilization of Educational Technology was offered to the second-year student in the first semester of 2001. Although it was designated as having two theoretical or lecturing hours, but I gave the class of thirty students a course description and told them to analyze statements in the description and find keywords to determine

1. Expected learning outcomes of the course.
2. Tasks or activities to achieve the outcomes.
3. Method of evaluation learning performance.

This class determined 3 learning outcomes including ability to solve contemporary educational problems, to analyze a real case study or situation of utilizing educational technology, and to write a proposal on utilization of educational technology.

For the first outcome, they proposed that each of them would solve 5 problems of their choice. Each week, two of them would host a talk show having 4 students pretend to be the Minister of Education or politicians. They would talk about educational problems and solutions. The second outcome would be done by a group of 2-3 persons, and then presented to the class both in verbal and written forms. The third outcome was done individually and submitted to me in written format via e-mail.

To evaluate the outcomes, they would like to have 20% of points for each outcome, and 40% for comprehensive

final exam. They wanted me to determine the method of evaluation. So, I did my best on this matter.

Each week, I found the class was lively and fun. The students were talented. Their role-playing was smoothly performed. I was surprised that some solutions of the problems they presented were profound. Besides, the presentation of group study was efficient. Some groups presented their study via PowerPoint. I found that they have learned all concepts of this course without my lecturing.

### **Conclusion**

As to my experience in implementing a learner-centered approach for 2 academic years, I saw positive changes in my students' personality. I have confident in the approach and hope to appropriately apply it in other courses. I shall continue to conduct more experiment, practice, research and development in teaching and learning. And I am opening to any suggestions that will help me reform my classroom.

\*\*\*\*\*